

Delicate by [talesfromthesnogbox](#)

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Summary:

Mike and Eleven had always been the best of friends. In fact, Max had always thought the two were soulmates, but El is reluctant to believe that fate could be so kind.

Soulmate AU, roommate AU, basically everything under the sun AU, I went a little crazy with this tumblr prompt, so enjoy!

Delicate

Author's Note:

Hey everyone! So I'm going to apologize in advance for how long this is and for how long it took to write. It's a slow burn of a one shot, but I hope you enjoy!

Mike and El had always been the best of friends. Neither of them could figure out why they got along so well.

Hawkins, Indiana wasn't El's birthplace, but it had been her home ever since Jim Hopper had adopted her when she was 12. Her new setting made her timid, but once she'd befriended her lovely party of nerds, she came right out of her shell.

Now at 21 years old, El, and the rest of their party called Chicago home. All six of them decided to head out to school in the windy city, and their parents couldn't have been more thrilled. The party was a tight-knit group, and while they all had their own lives, and their own friends outside of each other, it was comforting to come home to each other.

Two apartments across the hall from the others became available and the party couldn't resist snatching them up. Mike, El, and Will shared a cozy three bedroom while Max, Lucas, and Dustin shared a two bedroom. It was fate that the listings both became available on the same day, especially considering after a long period of contemplation, Lucas and Max had agreed to move in together.

It wasn't early on that Max and Lucas had discovered each other's soul marks. In fact, they didn't get along very well until their senior year, one year after Max had moved to Hawkins from sunny

California. Lucas always wore his heart on his sleeve, and his soul mark was constantly visible on his arm, just above his elbow. But Max... she was more reserved. She wanted to rebel against the whole “soul mark” thing, why should love be up to fate and not choice? In truth, she was scared knowing Lucas was her soulmate, but the moment she gave in and showed him her own matching mark just above where her heart sat, the two had been inseparable.

But even soulmates had their flaws.

“I swear, he never does the dishes!” Max grumbled loudly in the kitchen. Friday was the boys’ day; they all only had morning classes, so they all got to start the weekend off early. El and Max had never quite gotten into Dungeons and Dragons, so while they had girl time in Max’s apartment, El’s apartment had become the Chicago equivalent of Mike Wheeler’s basement.

El giggled. “I bet that’s how they feel about me over there then. Of *course* I would end up living with two neat guys of the party.”

“Whatever, I’m not doing his dishes again. Back to what you were saying... you met someone?”

A smile crossed El’s features. “Sort of, I mean, he hasn’t asked me out or anything, but we’ve been talking a lot after class, sometimes we’ll go get a coffee together.”

“That sounds like a start!”

“It is.” El sighed.

“But he’s not Mike.” Max prodded her. Everyone in the party *knew* that El and Mike were absolutely soulmates, there was no doubt about it. The only two that couldn’t see it were... well... El and Mike.

“Mike... he’s just a silly crush. Besides he’s my roommate, and my best friend, I don’t want to mess up what we’ve got.”

He wasn’t just a silly crush though. The swirly filigree shaped mark (that strangely looked like 011 the more she stared at it) sat just above El’s hipbone, and she couldn’t tell you how many times she’d dreamt of Mike having a matching mark. She loved him, she loved him with all her heart, but she’d known him for over 9 years... if he was her soulmate, they’d already know it.

“But even still El, you don’t want to just try it out? Who says you have to end up with your soulmate anyways? They could live halfway across the world for all you know. We were taught the statistics, El, only 45 percent of people on Earth *actually* meet their soulmate.”

“Then maybe I’ll be part of that 45 percent.” She clapped back. “Look, Max, I love you, but you’ve gotta stop bringing up Mike like this. I just want to get over him—”

“But he’s in love with you.” As soon as the words left her lips, Max threw her hands over her mouth. “I was not supposed to tell you that.”

El's face was stoic, but her mind was reeling. "I... I think I'm just gonna go."

Max stood and followed her to the door. "I'm sorry, please don't be mad, I just want what's best for you, and I want my friends to be as happy as I am."

El smiled. "I'm not mad at you, Max, I just... I think I need some air." She crossed the hall into her own apartment where the boys were no longer quite so deep in their campaign.

"I'm telling you, she was *smoking* hot, we totally clicked, but her soul mark didn't match mine." Dustin was talking animatedly to the rest of the party, obviously not that invested in his story.

"Yeah... I'm sure *that* is the reason she didn't go for you." Will shoved Dustin and moved to the couch. "Hey, El... you're home early, I thought you and Max—"

"We ended it early, I'm not feeling well." Her door closed softly behind her, but the party knew something was up.

Mike frowned. El was usually so open about everything; their friendship really knew no boundaries. *Well*, he thought, *I still haven't seen her soul mark... we have a few boundaries.*

“Is she okay?” Lucas pointed to her door.

“Let me go check on her.” Mike went to her door and knocked quietly. “El? Can I come in?”

She bit her lip, now in a cozy pair of pajamas curled in her bed, it’s nothing he hadn’t seen before, but she didn’t want to face him after what Max had told her.

“Go away.”

“Please? I just want to make sure you’re okay.”

“I’m fine.” She pleaded, voice muffled by her pillow.

“Okay, then let me see you’re fine.” El had a history of shutting down when she was upset. Sometimes her thoughts became too dark and dangerous for her to deal with, but the party was always there to help her through it.

Mike heard her footsteps get closer to the door, and she opened it with a huff.

“See? Fine.”

“El... wait.” He hated that he’d done it, but Mike was always overwhelmingly drawn to El. He loved the party, but El had to be his best friend. He worried about her, he loved her... he was *in* love with her (but he’d never tell her that). Mike followed her into her room and shut the door behind him. He followed her and took a seat next to her on her bed. “Don’t give me some bullshit answer. What happened?”

She sighed and covered her face with her hands. “Max and I sort of got into a fight about soulmates.”

Mike frowned. Sure, El had dated some, but he didn’t think she’d be this broken up over the soulmate issue. Their conversations had never quite meandered over to their love lives (or lack thereof), it just wasn’t something that the two of them really ever talked about. “Do you want to talk about it?”

El leaned into Mike’s shoulder and he immediately wound his arm around her. It was a common position for them, and he was a really good cuddler. “I... not really.”

“Okay.” He shrugged, happy to just be with her like this.

“I just... what if I never meet them, Mike? What if I’m always left wondering what they would be like, what they would look like... even if I’m with someone else? That’s hardly fair.” It was one of the reasons why she’d never tell Mike how she felt about him.

“It’s not fair, but really, everyone thinks about it. Everyone has someone out there for them, El, but not everyone meets that person.

It's okay to think that way, it's human nature."

He did have a point. "She had to go and bring up statistics and all that again about how not everyone meets their soulmate... it's easy for her to say, she found Lucas in high school."

"Sounds like someone's a little jealous." Mike poked her side, smiling at the girl in his arms.

"I'm not... okay maybe I'm a little jealous."

"You shouldn't be. You'll find someone amazing, I know it El. And think of it this way, Max is stuck with Lucas for the rest of their lives."

She giggled. "Same dick forever."

"I'm gonna pretend I didn't hear that." He winced.

"It's a joke, relax." El sighed. "What if I meet them at the wrong time though?"

"Well... they're your soulmate... they'll wait as long as they need to." *I know I would*, it goes without being said.

The two fall asleep in that position quickly, too comfortable with the other, too comfortable after unloading some weight off both of their shoulders. They sleep until Dustin of all people sneaks in.

“What the hell, guys, come check this out.”

Dustin’s voice carries through the apartment, and draws Mike out of his restful state. “Fuck off, Henderson. I’m comfortable.”

“Yeah I bet you are. So you figure it out yet? That you guys are actually soulmates?”

“No. Go away, seriously.”

“What, are you too afraid to tell her your soul mark is on your ass cheek?” Dustin snickers.

“I’m ignoring you. Goodnight Dustin.”

“Night, loverboy.”

Mike shakes his head at Dustin, settling back into El’s comforter. There was no way he was moving tonight, she was wrapped around him using every limb she could, but he wouldn’t have it any other way.

“Is your soul mark really on your ass cheek?” El’s soft voice startled him.

“Y-you heard all that?”

“Hard not to when Dustin is that fucking loud. Answer me, is it seriously on your butt?”

“N-n-no... well... kinda. I mean—” Her giggles cut him off. “Stop laughing! It’s not *really* on my butt, it’s like... really low on my back.”

“So your butt?”

“No!” He sighed. His mom always had this theory that it’s there because he was so closed off about his emotions, he’s starting to believe it might be true.

El gave him a mischievous look. “Can I see it?”

“I—I um...”

“It’s okay, you don’t have to, I’m only teasing. Unless you want to, then that’s totally up to you.” El snuggled further into his chest, her eyes feeling heavy again.

Silence washes over them, and Mike is suddenly all too aware of every little thing around them.

“Hey, El?”

“Hm?”

He pauses. “D-do you mind if I stay?”

El couldn't explain it, but she felt something shift in the room. Her heart beat wildly in her chest, and the tension in the air could be cut with a knife. For some reason, that simple question felt like a do or die decision, and she had to follow her gut.

“No... you can stay.”

Mike hid his smile by pressing a light kiss to the top of her head. Sure, they'd been affectionate with each other, holding hands, cuddling, before, but this felt different. Something had changed.

“Thanks.” He whispered, pulling her closer and resting his head on her pillow. “Night, El.”

“Night... loverboy.”

He let out a huff of breath and she giggled before they both drifted off.

The next morning, Mike realized that waking up beside El was pretty much the most perfect thing he could ever experience.

Her soft breaths hit his chest, and her arms tightened around him whenever he tried to move, but his favourite part of waking up beside her had to be how peaceful she looked. Her features were soft in the morning light, hair mussed, lips parted slightly. The angelic expression on her face tugged at his heartstrings, and he absolutely couldn't move now, not until she woke up. He never wanted to disturb her while she got her much needed rest.

Mike's cheeks reddened softly as he realized he was staring, and suddenly, she was stirring.

"Morning." He whispered sleepily.

El groaned. "You make a great pillow, Wheeler."

Mike smiled, pride filling his chest making his heart flutter. Their eyes met, and he felt *something*, an invisible force pulling them together. *This is it*, he thought, wondering if either one of them would push it one step further and take the plunge. But before either could do anything, Will burst into the room.

“Hey, the rest of us were talking... oh shoot did I interrupt something?”

“N-no.” El said, tearing herself away from Mike for the first time in hours. “What’s up?”

“Oh, just that we were gonna check out this new bar that just opened up a few blocks from here tonight instead of movie night. Sorry, I thought I heard you talking.”

“It’s fine, we were just getting up.” Mike said, scratching his head.

“Great! I’m making waffles if you guys want to join!”

El looked at Mike and smiled as Will left the room. The moment was unfortunately dead now, and Mike was kicking himself. *I should have done something.*

“I guess I’ll just... um... breakfast.” Mike told her, following Will out into the kitchen.

Mike had been avoiding El all day, a feat that proved to be tough considering they were roommates. He holed himself up in his room, doing anything he could to stay there and not face up to what had

almost happened this morning.

What if I'd gone through with it? What would happen? Would she have kissed me back? Would it have gone any further? Would she want to be my girlfriend?

Will pulled him out of his reverie.

“Hey, get ready we’re leaving soon.”

Mike nodded to him in acknowledgement, and minutes later, was joining Will and the rest of the gang in the living room.

The night out had been... interesting to say the least. Max and Lucas were attached at the hip all night, El clung to Dustin, and made for quite the wing-woman (he’d gone off talking to a pretty blonde girl in a quieter part of the bar). But the most shocking part of the evening was Will finding Evan.

Will had come to Mike, pale faced an hour after they’d arrived. “I think... Oh my god, Mike.”

“Hey, hey, what happened?”

Will swallowed. “I just spilled my beer on someone.”

"It's fine, it happens all the time in these places." Mike said with a shrug. "Why, are they giving you a hard time?"

"No... he's got my soul mark on his neck."

Mike's heart dropped to his stomach. "Th-that's great! You should go talk to him." He gave Will a forced smile. He tried to be happy for his friend, really, he did, but after his conversation last night with El, love was the last thing he wanted to think about.

Will nodded and walked back in the direction he came from. Mike could see him tap the other man on the shoulder and pull the neck of his shirt aside to show him the identical mark. The man's face immediately softened as he brought Will in for a hug.

All Mike could do was sigh and take another swig of his beer.

Before he knew it, Mike was drunker than he'd ever been in his life.

"I can walk I promise!" He slurred as El helped him into their apartment. She was pretty tipsy herself, but far less so than Mike.

"Oh really, is that why you fell out of the cab?"

He fell onto the couch bringing her with him. "See? Totally fine."

“Sure Michael.” El rolled her eyes.

“You’re so beautiful, you know?”

“And you’re so drunk. Come on, into bed.” She patted his poof of hair.

“Is that an invitation?” He wiggled his eyebrows. El’s eyes were wide. “I’m kidding, I’m kidding!” Mike put his arm around her and pulled her close. “But last night was really nice with the sleeping though.”

El sighed, her heart in her throat. “Yeah... it was Mike.”

“El?”

“Hm?”

“I love you.”

She giggled and tapped his nose. “I love you too, Wheeler.” El moved to get up, but he pulled her back down. “Mike?”

Mike didn’t think before he kissed her.

El melted into the kiss, kissing him as if she'd kissed him every day of her life. She found it was the most natural thing in the world, yet a new sense of excitement ran through her.

She sighed into the action, coming back for kiss after kiss like she was addicted to him. El clutched the front of his shirt while Mike fisted a hand in her curly hair, and their lips moved with the others in a way that sent a pleasant chill down Mike's spine.

Until El pulled away.

"O-oh my god, I'm so sorry, I don't know what got into me."

Mike groaned as she left his side, her warmth gone. He peeked a glance at her, messy hair, dilated pupils, swollen lips, and he wanted nothing more than to continue what they had going just moments before.

"El... Ellie please." Mike took her hands in his, only to have her pull them away. "El I love you."

"Mike, we can't." She shook her head. "We can't do this, not when our soulmates are still out there. I can't do that to you."

"Ellie I don't care. Fuck soulmates, *you're* my soulmate."

"You don't know that." She sounded choked up, like she was holding

back tears.

“No, I don’t, but what if we are? Didn’t you feel that? Because I felt it. Ellie, that kiss was like *magic*.”

“I can’t do this.”

“El... Ellie wait...” He tried to follow, but his stomach had other plans, and instead, he was running to the bathroom.

El sighed and marched right into the bathroom after him. She may have been upset over the kiss, but Mike was still her friend, and she couldn’t leave her friend to be sick on his own.

Her hand rubbed gentle circles on his back while the other ran through his dark locks as Mike emptied the contents of his stomach. “That’s it, let it out.” She soothed him before getting up to grab a glass of water and some mouthwash.

“T-thanks Ellie.” He said, gratefully accepting both as she cleaned him up with a washcloth. “I’m sorry. I shouldn’t have—”

“Stop, let’s not do this right now, okay? Wait for morning.”

Mike nodded, beginning to sober up. Together, they got off the floor, and El helped him into bed. “Goodnight, Mike.”

“Night, El.”

He awoke the next morning with a pounding headache and a deep sense of dread filling his chest. Mike knew that he and El would have to talk about what had happened at some point... it wasn't over last night, they'd just put a bookmark in the conversation, and he had a feeling it would have to happen today.

Staring at the ceiling wouldn't do him any good, so Mike slowly got out of bed and joined El in the kitchen.

“Did Will go out for breakfast?” He asked her, not wanting to immediately jump into a serious talk.

“No, he didn't make it home last night actually. I got a call from him this morning, he met his soulmate, Mike!”

“Good for him. He kind of mentioned it to me last night, I didn't know he stayed over there though.”

“Yeah, his name is Evan, they went back to his hotel. Evan is doing a road trip across the States... he's from York.” El had obviously had a longer conversation with Will about this than Mike had.

“New York?”

Her face fell. “No... like York in England. H-he’s lucky he was in the right place at the right time.”

“Oh...” Mike gulped loudly. “So it’s true what they say that soulmates can be anywhere then... even halfway across the world.”

“Yeah. They’ll work it out, I know it.”

El slid a coffee across the counter to Mike who sipped it gratefully. The silence wasn’t comfortable like it had been the previous morning. “El... El I have to apologize for what happened yesterday.”

“It’s okay.”

“No, it’s not okay! I—I shouldn’t have said anything, not when I was drunk anyways. But I meant it, I meant every word, El. You don’t have to say it back or anything, I... I just wanted you to know.” Mike had his hands in his hair, his heart pounding from his confession. It felt good, getting that weight off his chest. What didn’t feel good was hearing a snuffle come from El across the counter. He looked up to find tears in her eyes. “Hey, hey, don’t cry.” He stumbled around the counter to pull her into his arms.

“I can’t do this to you Mike, I—I love you too, but I can’t be with you knowing that my soulmate might be out there somewhere.”

“What if we forget about the soulmate thing? We may never meet them El.”

“They’re tattooed on our skin, Mike. Every time I see yours it’ll be a reminder that I’m not the one for you.”

“Are you planning on looking at my naked butt a lot?” His joke lightened the tension, pulling a giggle out of her. “To be fair... we’ve never actually *seen* each other’s soul marks...”

El said nothing. She debated with herself, not wanting to confirm that there was someone *better* out there for Mike... but... but *what if*...

“Y-you think we...?” She whispered, desperately hoping he was the one.

“I meant what I said last night, El.” He repeated himself. “I—I think you’re my soulmate.”

El looked up at Mike through her lashes. She wanted to be with him, she really *did*, but... her mind raced at the possibilities. They were extremely close, they shared everything (almost everything), she always felt a gravitational pull towards him... “Mike... once we look... there’s no going back from this.”

He blinked. He wasn’t expecting her to actually consider going through with it. “We don’t have to El, it... it was just a thought. But we’re bound to see them somehow, one way or another, it’ll happen, and we’ll know for sure. I don’t care if you’re my soulmate or not El, I want to be with you either way, but this... this is just a way of knowing for sure and doing it purposely.”

The silence stretched between them. He was still holding her, and although they'd slowed, the tears still dripped down her cheeks. "I think I'm gonna need some time to think about it."

Mike nodded. "Fair enough. Thanks for the coffee, El. I... I'm going to hang out in my room for a bit."

It was nearly five in the evening, and Mike still hadn't come out of his room.

Will was still out with Evan, so a deafening silence spilled over the apartment while El attempted to study in the living room.

She rubbed her neck, sore from the intensity of her focus on her psych notes. El had always been like this, thrown herself into other work as soon as she was faced with something difficult.

El groaned, closing her book. What had happened between herself and Mike that morning wasn't something she could just ignore, she needed to think it through, she needed calm, peace...

The gentle strumming of a guitar broke through the apartment.

Mike had taken up music in high school, and his acoustic guitar had

become the soundtrack to her life. Instantly, she felt the tension break and her mind clear.

Yoga.

El changed into something more appropriate for the meditative practice she found helped her so much growing up. She rolled out her mat in the living room and ran through a familiar routine, using Mike's strumming to keep her grounded.

Minutes of the practice had already relaxed her muscles, her mind felt clear again, and she soon became absorbed in her own head. So much so that she didn't realize the strumming had stopped.

She continued the sequence until she heard a soft gasp come from in front of her.

El frowned, dropping her hands and opening her eyes. Mike stood ten feet away, staring at her hip. The exact spot where her soul mark was.

"M-Mike?"

"El I... I didn't mean to see... your shirt it just..."

Her stomach dropped. "You saw my mark?"

He nodded, his face blank. El felt like throwing up, her breath hitched nervously, and everything she'd done to calm herself came crashing down on her.

Mike gulped and turned slightly, looking awkwardly to the ceiling as he pulled at the waistband of his jeans until a delicate black filigree mark was visible.

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She was speechless. El stumbled backwards until she felt the back of her knees bump into the couch. She fell in a heap, her hand covering her mouth.

“I um... El I'm sorry for sneaking up on you like that.”

Her eyebrows rose into her hairline, a pleasant shiver scaled her body, her heart was pounding, and suddenly all she felt was excitement. El was *giddy*.

A giggle bubbled from her lips, and she could no longer hold herself back. “I—I can't believe you just *moon*ed me!” She giggled uncontrollably, throwing her head back into the cushions.

Mike frowned, this was *not* the response he was hoping for when he'd decided to show her his matching soul mark. “El?”

“You – you just pulled your pants down and th-there it is! On your ass, just like Dustin said it was.”

He took a seat beside her on the couch. Mike didn't know how he should be feeling. Of course, he was elated, he was right, El was his soulmate, but why was this her reaction?

Upon further inspection, Mike noticed tears rolling down her face. Her shoulders shook again, but this time, she was crying. “El, talk to me, please.”

El gave up and threw her arms around Mike. “I... I can't believe it's actually you.”

Instantly, his heart melted. He'd automatically assumed the worst, but of course his Ellie... she always did lead with her emotions.

“Just like I said, right?” Mike's arms wound around her body, a hand flying to stroke her hair.

“I didn't think I would ever find you.” She sniffed, refusing to let go of him.

“I've been right in front of you the whole time.” He pressed a kiss to her temple. “God Ellie, I'm so in love with you, I've been waiting for you to realize it without acting like an ass. Well, except for last

night...”

“No, stop talking about last night, I was scared and confused. I didn’t want to fall in love with you, but oh my god,” she let out a giggle and pulled away from the hug, “now I know why I did.”

Mike couldn’t wipe the shit-eating grin off his face. He didn’t think he’d ever seen her happier, despite the tears rolling down her cheeks. She was *his*, he was hers, and instantly he felt his entire purpose in life was to make her happy, make her smile every morning, cherish her... he’d do anything he could for the love of his life.

“El, you’re my everything. I love you... I can’t imagine my life without you in it.”

“I love you too Mike.” She hastily wiped at her eyes. “God, I’m sorry, I’m ridiculous.”

He shook his head. “You’re beautiful.”

El looked at him, losing herself in the depths of his eyes, and couldn’t hold herself back from kissing him.

It was nothing like the kiss from the night before. The night before was frantic and rushed, but this... *this*... a warmth started in her belly as their lips moved together slowly. Their kisses were soft, feather light, almost tentative as they began to learn the other in a way they’d never done before. The warmth seared through her and made

her heart thump excitedly in her chest. God, she could do this for *hours* and she wouldn't get tired of it.

He pulled away first, slowly, making sure to press two short pecks to her swollen lips before his eyes met hers again. Her cheeks were pink, eyes bright, and lips curled into a dazed smile.

"Hi." She whispered, taking her bottom lip between her teeth.

Mike's vision was glazed over; he was in absolute bliss. "That was fucking incredible."

El's fit of giggles started up once again, breaking the intensity of the last few minutes. This time, Mike joined her, leaning on her shoulder as they laughed, causing him to topple over her onto the couch. He held her close, trying to shift most of his weight off of her, and of course, Max chose that moment to waltz straight into their apartment.

"Hey El, can I borrow your—oh shit," she covered her eyes turning away from then, "I'm sorry, I didn't realize you guys were... I'll just come back later."

"Max it's alright, you weren't interrupting anything." Mike shouted over, picking himself and El up off the couch. He pecked her lips once more before Max came barreling back into their living room.

"Cool. El, can I borrow your curling iron? And while we're at it, you

can tell me what I just walked in on.”

El nodded, and Max went straight for the bathroom to retrieve what she came for. “Curling iron, yes. The explanation...”

“That she’ll have to give you tomorrow, we’ve got plans tonight.” Mike explained, another shit-eating grin crossing his face. El rolled her eyes. “Sorry, I just wanted to spend some time with you.” He whispered in her ear, kissing her cheek. “We’ve got some catching up to do.”

Max reappeared, curling iron in hand. “Yeah, you two have a *lot* to explain. You’re lucky I’m running late.”

“I’ll give you the spark notes...” El nodded cheekily. “I found him.”

“Mike? He’s your roommate, did you lose him last night or something...” El saw the realization dawn on her friend and she giggled, taking Mike’s hand in hers. “Him? Like... *him*? Your... Lucas?”

“Yeah, I found my Lucas.”

“Well fuck El, I hate to say I told you so, but...”

El got up and pushed her out the door, shutting it behind Max. “Oh shut up and go curl your hair.”

“Hey Lucas you’ll never guess what just happened!” She could hear Max yelling to her own soulmate through the door.

“That went well.” Mike shook his head.

“Catching up to do you say?”

Mike’s hand flew behind his neck, scratching at his hairline awkwardly. “I mean...”

El giggled and kissed him sweetly. “I’ve been crushing on you for 9 years, you’re right, we do have some catching up to do.”

His face lit up, and he started rambling off about takeout and dates.

“As long as I’m with you, I don’t care.”